



# What Were They Thinking?

One of the major talking points in cycling over the past few months has been the changes to the Olympic Track Cycling Program and unfortunately this is something that has had a major effect on my own future career. For those who may not know of the exact details of the restructured program, the UCI and the International Olympic Committee announced late in 2009 that the following events will no longer be on the program for the 2012 London Olympic Games:

- Points Race (gone)
- Madison (gone)
- Individual Pursuit (gone)

Previously, the Olympic Track program consisted of seven events for men, whereas women had only three events with a chance to win medals. The rationale behind these changes was to provide both men and women with equal medal winning opportunities. The problem that was faced when making this decision to change the events is that apparently, no more medals could be allocated to the Track Cycling Olympic Program.

The new Olympic Track Cycling Program will now include the events listed below for both men and women, a total of 10 medals on offer.

- Teams Pursuit
- Omnium
- Sprint
- Team Sprint
- Keirin

For me personally, it has been a dream of mine since childhood to compete at the Olympics in the Women's Points Race. As a teenage cyclist my favourite event was always the Points Race. I remember when I was an Under 17, my coach at the time, Kevin Tabotta, entered me in the Under 19 Points Race at the National Titles as the Under 17s didn't have this event. This was so that I could gain some valuable experience in a race that he thought I would be best suited



Belinda accelerates in the Jayco Bay Classic C.J. Farquharson

to in the years to come. It was at this point that the seed was sown for what I wanted to achieve in the future.

Following the announcement of the changes, I felt, to put it mildly, quite disheartened by the fact that what I had been focusing on for my entire career, had suddenly been taken away. To have someone who is not an athlete with a simple stroke of a pen take away something that people have spent two thirds of their life working towards seems to me spectacularly unfair. It is great that more women get the opportunity to compete at the Olympics with the inclusion of the Teams Pursuit and Omnium, but for this to happen at the expense of events with such a long running history is disappointing.

Personally I find it hard to understand how events that have only been at a World Championships level for a maximum of two years, are now suddenly the pinnacle of Track Cycling. The Women's Omnium was only introduced to the World Championship Program in 2009, and the Women's Teams Pursuit in 2008. To make changes to the Olympic program in the middle of a four year cycle, at such late notice is also unfair. You may think that two years out from a competition is enough, but we as athletes have dreams and goals that we plan for many years in advance. It is difficult to suddenly change everything about the

way you ride. Imagine a cricketer, a spin bowler suddenly told he has to become a fast bowler. Or a 1,500m swimmer being informed he can race no longer than 200 metres.

Another question that needs to be asked is how these changes will affect track endurance cycling into the future. In the past, track endurance cycling has provided many initial successes for young upcoming riders, and a fantastic stepping stone to a professional road career. Without as many opportunities and clearly laid out pathways on the track, will aspiring cyclists bypass track racing, opting to try to make it purely on the road? I may be showing my bias, but for me I think that these changes make track cycling less interesting to watch!

Even though I have been really disappointed with the decision that has been made, I realise I can do nothing about it and it is now time to move on and look at the new opportunities that lay ahead. There is a chance for me to reinvent myself, make new goals and earn a place on the Australian team for the London 2012 Olympics. And finally, on the bright side, I guess there still will be Rainbow Jerseys on offer for the events no longer on the Olympic Program for me to aspire towards.

Happy training,  
Belinda